

Interaction and Competition with Domestic Livestock

Can Bison and Cattle Coexist?

Based on the experiences of free-ranging programs within other regions, bison and cattle can coexist on the landscape.

Since the 1940s, free-ranging bison and cattle have coexisted within the same regions of the Henry Mountains, Utah.

Regional ranchers in Saskatchewan report that they occasionally see bison in the presence of cattle, but have not had incidents of bison harassing the cattle, and note that the two species seem pretty tolerant of each other.

What Interactions Could Occur Between Bison and Cattle?

There is little evidence of bison preventing cattle from utilizing vegetation and water sources.

Observed interactions between the two species have shown that they will sometimes graze within close proximity.

What is the Current Condition of the Range in Potential Relocations Areas?

Prior to a potential restoration, FWP would have to evaluate the actual ecological potential of a site and its ability to support a bison herd. The following factors would need to be examined: the existing conditions of the range, the seasonal range, and its utilization by all species.

Will Free-Ranging Bison Attempt to Breed Domestic Cattle?

Bison do not breed with cattle in a natural environment.

Bison and domestic cattle do not naturally hybridize.

There have been no reports from free-ranging programs in other regions of wild bison attempting to breed cattle.

Will there be Competition for Forage between Bison and Cattle?

Bison and cattle do consume some of the same forage, however there is lack of information as to how bison will use different landscapes in Montana.

A study that compared the foraging behavior of bison and cattle in Utah, observed that bison and cattle differ in the elevation and degree of slope in which they graze, with bison more often grazing at higher elevations and steeper slopes.

Scarnecchia (1986) and Hobbs and Carpenter (1986) both caution against generalizing AUMs among species, and note that the differences in diet selection and forage behavior must be examined for each species.